

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SIG-01 MMO-01 SAB-02 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02
IO-13 H-01 AID-05 NSC-05 SS-15 PM-05 /080 R

DRAFTED BY ARA/PPC:CPEARSON
APPROVED BY ARA:WPSTEDMAN
ARA/PPC:NSSMITH

-----060000 170229Z /70

P 162330Z AUG 77
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 194871

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR

SUBJECT: LA GOVERNMENT REACTIONS TO PANAMA TREATY

1. REPORTS OF REACTIONS FROM LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A US-PANAMA AGREEMENT ON THE TERMS OF A NEW TREATY HAVE JUST BEGUN TO COME IN. AMONG GOVERNMENTS EXPRESSING AN OPINION, REACTION HAS BEEN PREDOMINANTLY FAVORABLE.

2. STATEMENTS HIGHLY COMMENDATORY TO THE US WERE MADE BY THE PRESIDENTS OF VENEZUELA AND COSTA RICA. STATEMENTS EXPRESSING SATISFACTION WITH THE TREATY DEVELOPMENT, "HAPPINESS," "PLEASURE," ETC., AS AN INDICATION THAT PROBLEMS CAN BE WORKED OUT THROUGH MUTUAL DISCUSSION, WERE MADE BY BOLIVIA AND ARGENTINA. THE GENERAL ASSUMPTION THAT THE DEVELOPMENT IS A WELCOME ONE IS UNSURPRISING IN VIEW OF THE LONG-EXPRESSED SOLIDARITY OF VIRTUALLY ALL LATIN GOVERNMENTS FOR PANAMA'S ASSERTION OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY.
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3. THE ONLY CRITICAL COMMENTS WERE DIRECTED TOWARD SPECIFIC TERMS. COLOMBIA AND ECUADOR BOTH EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF HIGHER TOLLS UNDER THE NEW TREATY. THE OFFICIAL COMMENTS WERE MADE PRIVATELY, BUT, IN THE CASE OF ECUADOR, WERE REFLECTED IN EDITORIAL

COMMENTS IN A PRO-GOVERNMENT DAILY.

4. NO OTHER REPORTS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED ON GOVERNMENT REACTION IN THE CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES, MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA OTHER THAN COSTA RICA, OR THE REST OF SOUTH AMERICA OTHER THAN THOSE MENTIONED. PRESS TREATMENT IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL HAS BEEN FAVORABLE.

5. THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE TAKING A SUPPORTIVE ROLE. CASTRO TOLD SEN. CHURCH PRIVATELY THAT SINCE IT WOULD BE HARD FOR PRESIDENT CARTER TO PUSH FORWARD ON THE PANAMA TREATY RATIFICATION AND THE CUBAN NORMALIZATION SIMULTANEOUSLY, CUBA IS PREPARED TO HAVE THE NORMALIZATION PROCEED SLOWLY SO THE TREATY CAN HAVE FIRST PRIORITY. THIS DON'T-ROCK-THE-BOAT APPROACH WAS ALSO REFLECTED IN THE PRENSA LATINA ACCOUNT, WHICH REPORTED IN A VERY MATTER-OF-FACT TONE ON EFFORTS UNDER WAY IN PANAMA AND THE US TO OBTAIN RATIFICATION DESPITE THE EXPECTATION OF SOME OPPOSITION.

6. FOR ASUNCION: PLEASE PASS TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN. VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, CANALS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 16-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE194871
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: CPEARSON
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770296-0082
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770855/aaaabuvu.tel
Line Count: 84
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c9c1f759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1583926
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LA GOVERNMENT REACTIONS TO PANAMA TREATY
TAGS: PBOR, PN
To: ALL POSTS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c9c1f759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009